

Testimony of Lisa Emde  
Spouse of SFC Scott T. Emde

March 30, 2004  
Subcommittee on National Security,  
Emerging Threats and International Relations

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations. My name is Lisa Emde. As a spouse of an activated National Guardsman I felt both pride and fear as my husband shipped out to the desert for Operation Enduring Freedom in early May 2002 after five months of training at Ft. Bragg NC. When he called in June to say that he had injured his shoulder and would be shipped home, my first thought was that I did not want him seeing a military doctor. Being raised in Tidewater Virginia home of numerous military bases for the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines, I had heard many horror stories of the incompetence of military doctors.

My husband was assigned to Walter Reed Medical Facility. He was flown back to the states by military lift and assigned a room at the guesthouse. My children and I drove up to Washington and after much to do also got a room at the overcrowded guesthouse. My husband was told that he could not see a doctor until the following week and that he could go home until that time. At a cost of \$30.00 per day, we decided that going home would be the best course of action. I was dismayed to discover that it was up to us to get his military issued gear home. His gear consisted of four large crates with weights up to 250 pounds. I had to rent a U-haul and fortunately, we found two orderlies to assist me in loading the trunks. We were unable to turn in his gear because there was no one at his home unit as they were all still deployed. Once home, we had quite a time unloading and storing the trunks.

My husband made the six hour roundtrip drive in order to return to Walter Reed for his appointment, which led to months of physical therapy, a diagnosis of a rotator cuff torn in several places and ultimately, months later, surgery followed by more physical therapy. Those first few days of confusion and disorganization seemed to set the pattern for what occurred over the next year. His surgery was finally set for late October 2002. I must say that after meeting his surgeon I was pleased to have my fear of military doctors put to rest. His surgeon was very professional yet he explained everything in layman's terms, even going so far as to give me his home telephone number because we were driving home that evening after the surgery.

While the medical attention my husband received was quite good, the run around he received for station duty or lack of station duty was deplorable. Because he was attached to Walter Reed and they could not billet him, it took months with my husband nagging to get a duty assignment or reassignment to Ft. Bragg. His physical therapy was set up for Ft. Eustis, which is located near our home. He repeatedly asked to be assigned for duty during this period and was told to just hold tight. He finally resorted to volunteering at the hospital and Red Cross at Ft. Eustis.

During my husband's recovery period his orders lapsed four times, because we were told that there was only one person who was responsible for reissuing orders due to medical extensions. This person was notified through proper channels for the need of the extensions with what should have been adequate time (at least a month out) to produce the orders before any lapse occurred. During three of the lapses in orders, we went from one to three weeks without pay. During the second to last lapse, we went without pay for eight weeks. During that eight-week period, our mortgage company threatened us and called my office almost daily. Even with the Soldiers/Sailors Relief Act, it seems that they can harass you and report to the credit agencies your late payment. We were fortunate that we are a two-income household and were able to pay for utilities, food and such. I shudder to think of the repercussions to families who rely on only the one income of the activated member. Even with my income at one point, I had checks bounce because of an automated payment that was to be deducted on the 17<sup>th</sup> of the month, after a pay that did not come. On another instance, I was unable to pay for my daughters skating lessons. I cannot adequately relay to you, the extreme stress on our family because of these pay glitches.

It is hard enough on National Guard families to have their lives disrupted by activation of these members to full duty. However, the delay in prompt medical treatment/surgery because of lack of doctors and lapses in pay are both deplorable and unnecessarily add to this hardship. For both my family and others of the National Guard who have had problems similar to ours, I thank this subcommittee for their time and effort on our behalf.